

Glimpses of Books and the Book World

The Haig Despatches

In accordance with a time honored and highly important custom of the British army, Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig addressed eight "despatches" to his Government in the four years he was commander in chief of the British Expeditionary Force—that is, in the period from December, 1915, to the early part of April, 1919. At a suitable time after their receipt by the War Office these despatches (reports we would call them in our army) appeared as supplements to the London Gazette and thus were made available in their essential and distinctive features to the reading public of the world. But they were too important a feature of the history of the war not to have attained to the dignity of book form. They appear in a handsome volume bearing the imprint of E. P. Dutton & Co., having been slightly edited by Lieut.-Col. J. M. Barrington, private secretary to Haig. They set down the story of operations on the western front and represent the official narrative from December, 1915, to April, 1919. With the volume, to which Marshal Haig has contributed a gracious introduction, comes a separate set of military maps mounted on linen and enclosed in a box of the same size and binding as that of the text.

"The Hesitant Heart"

The offering that Winifred Welles makes in *The Hesitant Heart* (Huebsch) is rather slender, but what there is of it is graceful and delicately turned. She is quite successful in capturing that unexpressed note that is the essential charm of the true lyrical gift. What she sings is not new, but it is far from hackneyed as she presents it. She must be young—only the young may reach poignant utterance so unadorned as she does at times; and she must be unselfish, for there is no suggestion of schools or movements in her work. Her brief lyrics, faintly resembling Sara Teasdale's occasionally, and her sonnets are well turned technically and she has avoided the ancient and honorable clichés beloved of infant poets; but her dreams are the eternal dreams, her songs are the eternal songs. The wistful note that sounds at times in her poetry in *My Heart Can't Break and Pee Lives So Long*, for instance, lifts them to authentic utterance. Her vein of poetry is a true one. It has yet to be more deeply mined.

"Basil Everman"

LSIE SINGMASTER, an American writer, is compared by her publishers to the English novelists of the day. She does indeed have much in common with them. She writes, for instance, of literary folk, as May Sinclair so often does, and as Clemence Dane has in *Legend*. But she

has this advantage over some of the contemporary women novelists: she realizes the importance of the story. In contrast to their preoccupation with personality and mood, she has planned her tale, *Basil Everman* (Houghton Mifflin), which slowly unravels as the book develops. It is intricate and would be subtle, though unfortunately the denouement is not unexpected. Her book is slightly commonplace for this reason, also because in going for story telling, she has neglected intensive character study. Yet she has recognized the importance of both and her book, though not by any means brilliant, is (most damning and colorful of all words!) able.

Her main character, Basil Everman, is dead. His delayed posthumous fame, for a few literary fragments resurrected from an old magazine, startles us about his life in the small college town in which many years before he had lived. Drama is effected by the opposition of an adoring, puritanical sister to any restoration of him. She attempts to hide his identity because of her belief, in spite of her love for him, that he was sinful. She also believes Eleanor Bent to be his illegitimate daughter, and with this girl her own boy Richard is in love. But the book is a comedy, not a tragedy, and there is no illegitimacy in the tale.

Only this fragment is given us upon which to judge the hero's literary merits: "Hunger knows no niceties and passion no laws."

The one very feeling criticism we have to make is that the dull proper names Lister, Scott, Green, Bent, seem woefully uninspired and in some queer way mark the tempo of the book.

Lincoln's Creed

William E. Barton's *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln* (Doran) is at once a biography, an analysis of Lincoln's religion, a group of lectures on Lincoln and a bibliography. Mr. Barton's method is first to present the successive environments of Lincoln's life, including Springfield and Washington; then to analyze all the evidence presented in books and lectures and special incidents relating to this special aspect of his life, and to summarize his conclusions in the third part of the text, which is devoted to *The Religion of Abraham Lincoln*. This Mr. Barton states in the form of a creed made up of extracts which are thoroughly Christian in spirit, from Lincoln's speeches and writings. The single page on which this creed appears is the outcome of the 239 pages preceding it, one of which contains the announcement that Mr. Barton proposes to write another book about Lincoln.

Boyhood in Ireland

UNDER the engaging title *Pinches of the Spring* (Houghton Mifflin) Forrest Reid presents an interesting study of adolescent boyhood which centres in a preparatory school in Ireland, where Beach Trull, the chief figure, is a "day boy." Fatherless, but with a wise and charming mother, he is a likable boy, more English than Irish in his natural pose, lack of imagination and love of fair dealing. Except for one exciting episode there is little action. Yet it is absorbing to watch that interplay of character upon character which makes destiny. Evan Hayes, unable to conquer the cowardice which comes from too active an imagination, has an attractive nature, but only for a time. Palmer Dorset, for all his very evident defects, will wear well in the great game of life. And unhappy, sensitive Miles Oulton, sunk in those troubles of boyhood which are all the greater because they bound the horizon, has in him much of that fibre which endures and grows the stronger for strain. Reid, for the vivid Mr. Ledgerwood, the sarcastic young master in the school, he is hard to believe in; but, as his like appears constantly in tales of English schools, he is evidently all too real. It would be an illuminating study in national characteristics to compare a tale like this with our American Penrod, for example. The balance in maturity and psychological subtlety, if not in breadth of humor, would, we fear, tip rather heavily on the side of these English and Irish boys.

"Ballads of Old New York"

Arthur Guiterman in a lyrical and appealing manner has put into verse a large share of the myths and historical oddities that cluster about old New York. He has started with the Dutch period, where, undoubtedly, the richest material is to be found, and travels along in a chronological manner to the Revolutionary period. *Ballads of Old New York* (Harcourt) is not away from poetry—the very themes forbid this—but included in the book are many pieces that deserve that name. Preserving each ballad is a lyric somewhat kindred to the ballad in atmosphere, and it is in these lyrics that Mr. Guiterman's muse attempts its farthest flights.

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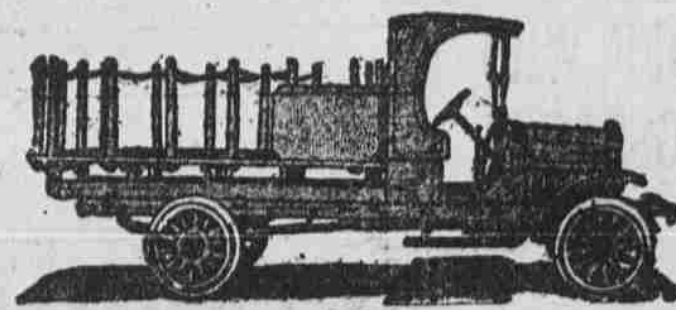
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